

## 'Nearly 75,000 people commit suicide yearly in India'

In a revelation that many would find startling, Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss has said that nearly 75,000 people commit suicide in India every year for varied reasons, including mental disorder.

'Suicide in India is a major threat and nearly 75,000 people commit suicide every year. Poverty, debt, illiteracy and mental imbalance are the main reasons for this menace,' Ramadoss said.

'Seven to eight percent of the Indian population is facing some sort of mental problem, of which over 1.5 percent (15 million) needs special care,' the minister told IANS on the sidelines of a conference in the capital.

Portraying a grim picture of the little understood world of mental health, the minister said mental illness was the cause of about 100,000 people trying to commit suicide in the country each year.

'I do confess that the national mental health programme of my ministry is not performing well. I am worried and we are in the process of reviewing the programme.

'Besides, we are planning to provide basic mental health training to doctors at the primary healthcare centres as rural India is prone to such problems. Plans are afoot to train the MBBS doctors on this subject so that they can handle situations at the sub-division and district levels,' he said.

He said the proposal would cover 400 districts in the next three years and all the districts of India within five years' time.

According to statistics available with the ministry of social justice and empowerment, there are over 900,000 females in India who need treatment for mental illness.

Of these nearly 280,000 fall in the age group 10-29 and nearly 250,000 in the age group 30-50.

Older men commit suicide more than younger men. However, more women who commit suicide were below 30 years or above 65 years of age.

Experts believe that mental health in India is far from getting due attention.

'Treatment of mental health in India is still a taboo. Moreover, there is a ten-fold shortage of psychiatrists in India. There are only 3,000 psychiatrists in India as against a demand for over 32,000,' said R.C. Jiloha, head, department of psychiatry, Maulana Azad Medical College.

'See India has 3,000 psychiatrists but the US has 6,000 Indian psychiatrists. This describes our lack of focus in this stream of treatment,' said Nimesh G. Desai, medical superintendent of the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), the only mental hospital of Delhi.

Desai said blind believes and stigma are still restricting people from coming out to avail themselves of medical treatment. Further, the mental health infrastructure in the country is not very good.

'We have 37 mental hospitals, of which three including IHBAS have been revamped. While the country needs more such hospitals, we should not forget to upgrade the existing hospitals.

'I believe, over 90 percent of mental illness can be cured through OPD (out patient department) treatment. Only 10 percent mentally ill people need hospitalisation.'

Experts at Sanjivini, an NGO working in the field of mental health for decades, said treatment of this disease was not focussed in India.

'Mental illness in India is considered as a behavioural disorder rather than a health menace. The growing stress, increasing competition among youngsters and feeling of loneliness among old people are aggravating the problem,' said Anandita Paul, head of the mental health intervention unit of Sanjivini.

'In today's world there is no scope for failure. From school students to working executives everyone is facing stress to become first, which later leads to depression and metal illness. Though women attempt to commit suicide more, it's men who get success in their attempts,' Paul added.

*Prashant K. Nanda ( © IANS / India eNews)*